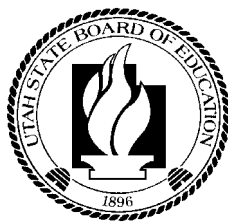


**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Sunset Junior High School
1610 North 250 West
Sunset, Utah 84015**

April 27-28, 2004



Utah State Office of Education
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P.O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Sunset Junior High School
1610 North 250 West
Sunset, Utah 84015**

April 27-28, 2004

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Interim State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

**DIVISION OF
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Salt Lake City, Utah

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FOREWORD

A major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate inservice growth and school improvement. Consequently, requirements include not only meeting the standards of the Utah State Office of Education, but also completing a school evaluation every six years.

School evaluation is that effort by the local school staff to take a comprehensive look at the school's program, operation, and effect. The school determines how closely its purposes and philosophy coincide with its actual practices and the degree to which its stated objectives are being reached. It is a three-phased program: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 27-28, 2004, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to meet the requirements referred to above.

The entire staff of Sunset Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal James Schmidt is commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for the generally fine program being provided for Sunset Junior High School students, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more adequately meet the needs of the students of Sunset Junior High School.

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Interim State Superintendent
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**Board of Regents Appointments*

10/30/03

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Dr. Paul Waite.....	Secondary School Director
Kathie Bone	Elementary School Director
Craig Poll	Elementary School Director
Dr. Sandy Petersen.....	Elementary School Director
Rick Call	Director of Curriculum
Thomas Feil	Director of Student Services
Mary Lou Seamons	Applied Technology Education Director
Ellen Stantus	Special Education Director

SUNSET JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

James Schmidt Principal
Ryan Hansen Assistant Principal
Robert Ito Assistant Principal
Dick Close Assistant Principal

Counseling

Carter Haacke Counselor
Sarah Hansen Counselor
Lloyd Kjar Counselor

Support Staff

Susan Andrews Citizenship Secretary
Lee Longaker Attendance Secretary
Lynette Nickell Counseling Secretary
Sandra Ralphs ISS
Ryan Morrel Resource Officer
Ruth Ann Wilson Middle School Coordinator

Custodians

Randy Barton, Head
Scott Bush, Asst. Head
Calli Bennet
Rodney Hansen
Garn Meacham
Maggie Martin
Curtis McNally
Dave Wallbert

Cooks

Dixie Simpson, Head
Helen Jackson
Chamae Leato
Julie Leaton
Chrisdee Lerohl
Teresa Neville
Hazelann Rushton
Sherry Stewart

Trackers

Leah Bass
Samantha Pierce
Adam Nielson

Teacher Aides

Susan Moser
Wendy Tremea

Computer Lab

Leroy Black
Shaylce George

Faculty

Penelope Burbank
Eileen Burke

Richard Callister
Larry Carrillo

Jason Charlesworth
Pat Crawford

Eileen Dempsey
Liz Evans
Joan Froerer
Carol Gardiner
Emily Godfrey
Robin Gumbrecht
Jackie Hall
Marci Hamblin
Helen Heiner
Robert Hillier
Anna Holman
Robert Jensen
Kim Johnson

Mark Jolley
Mark Jordan
Claire Long
Wanda Luce
Sherry Meibos
Dean Miller
Christie Nicholas
Dennis O Bray
Tamilla Oliver
Nolan Olsen
Ann Page
Lance Powell
Brigita Robertson

Merci Rossmango
Mary Shepard
Trevor Smith
Heather Sneed
Scott Sperry
Linda Stalter
Holly Stock
Adam Thompson
Ed Trout
Nancy Welsh
Judy Williams
Todd Williams
Linda Zeeman

SUNSET JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

In partnership with students, faculty, parents, and community, Sunset Junior High will strive to prepare students to become responsible, productive citizens by providing a balanced curriculum that promotes thinking skills and self-esteem in a safe atmosphere of respect and cooperation.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- Students learn best when discipline is consistent.
- Students should be accountable for their actions.
- Students should have the opportunities to learn in different ways and to express what they learn through a variety of learning assignments.
- Students learn best in a safe environment.
- Students' self-concept and learning improve when they are treated respectfully.
- Students learn best when supported by parents, teachers, administrators, and the community.

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Lori Gardner, Hunter Junior High, Granite School District,
Visiting Team Chairperson

Stephen Diamond, Indian Hills Middle School, Jordan School District

Rob Courante, Murray High School, Murray School District

Mari Damask, Clayton Middle School, Salt Lake City School District

VISITING TEAM REPORT

SUNSET JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Sunset Junior High School was built in 1964. Located in the city of Sunset, the school serves communities in Sunset, Clinton, and South Weber. The school originally served a rural population; however, since the 1980s farmland has been replaced by subdivisions, transforming the area into suburban communities. Many families of students who attend the school are either in the military or work at Hill Air Force Base. The student population of 1,020 represents diverse socioeconomic classes; 30 percent of students are on free or reduced-price lunch, while others come from upper-middle-class neighborhoods. The economic diversity is more significant than ethnic diversity, as only 18 percent of students are ethnic minority. Approximately 67 percent of students walk to school, while some are bussed from a considerable distance.

The school serves an increasing number of at-risk students, which has led to a determination on the part of the faculty and staff to provide a comprehensive support system. The faculty and staff, with a combined total of approximately 70, include 3 administrators, 47 teachers, 3 counselors, a clinical psychologist, and a middle school coordinator. The school has developed many programs to meet the social and emotional needs of students.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

Sunset Junior High has spent considerable time analyzing student achievement data. Data has been used to appropriately place students in reading and math classes. Teachers use the PLATO software to assess student mastery in the core academic areas. End-of-level testing results have been provided to teachers and are used by most to make instructional decisions. The Visiting Team found evidence that data is used regularly to inform daily practice. However, several sources of pertinent data and analysis were not adequately presented in the published profile. Of the myriad sources of data presented, the most significant to teachers and staff were the student, faculty, and parent surveys. Student surveys indicated significant concern regarding a sense of safety and caring on the part of teachers. This became the substance of staff discussion and a driving force in the creation of the school's action plan.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The Visiting Team recommends that the school revise its school profile to include disaggregated information regarding student achievement. Demographic data should be represented so as to indicate change over time. End-of-level and 9th grade testing results need to be measured by district and/or state standards. In order for the document to serve its purpose in orienting the school community to its improvement plan and process, data needs to be accompanied by analysis and explanation. The Visiting Team also suggests that a brief history of the school's reform efforts be included to provide a framework for current work.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- The school should review attendance and disciplinary data to correlate with student achievement data.
- Programs (such as the school-wide reading emphasis) to which the faculty has committed resources should be evaluated, and data published to assess effectiveness.
- As the faculty and staff implements the desired results for student learning, indicators of success will need to be developed and results incorporated into the School Profile.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

- a) *To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

The principal, Dr. Schmidt, routinely gathers data and conducts surveys to inform his practice and to focus his leadership. In September 2002, an Accreditation Steering Committee was appointed by the Sunset Junior High Joint Staff Committee. The Steering Committee, composed of three teachers, the media specialist, and the principal, participated in USOE Leadership Training. The Steering Committee then trained the entire faculty in the process.

The Steering Committee focused on the collection of data derived from school records and from surveys developed by the school for parents, students, and teachers. The self-study reports that information on demographics, standardized and criterion-referenced testing, truancy and behavior, and feeder elementary schools was collected and routinely shared with faculty. This information formed the basis of the school improvement process.

The Visiting Team found that the Steering Committee has been committed to providing information to teachers, parents, and the community to drive discussion and collaboration on the school improvement process.

- b) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

The Visiting Team found that much effort has been given to generating data. It is clear that the principal, Dr. Schmidt, routinely assesses the school climate and instructional effectiveness, and uses that information as a base for his decisions. However, the self-study, as currently published, does not provide a clear picture of who is learning and who is not. It does not provide information regarding program effectiveness. Over the course of the site visit, members of the Steering Committee and others responsible for the collection and compilation of data realized the need to revise the self-study to provide a clearer understanding of the school's strengths and limitations.

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Sunset Junior High School's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

- Students should be able to read and comprehend at grade level.
- Students will demonstrate appropriate social skills.
- Students will experience and understand cultural diversity.
- Students should be problem solvers.
- Students should be able to collect, analyze, and communicate data.
- Students will communicate effectively through reading, writing, and speaking.
- Students will become knowledgeable and active citizens.
- Students will become effective listeners.
- Students will be able to interact positively with their peers, teachers, and others.

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

The collaborative effort to build a shared vision for the school has included all of the groups of the school community. Open invitations for parent involvement

were issued by the administration through the Community Council and the PTSA. Students were given the opportunity to provide input through several sources such as PTSA, peer mediators, and student government. Teachers were involved with school committees, focus groups, departments, and participation with the Joint Staff Study Committee (JSSC). Every teacher and staff member had the opportunity to provide input through an open forum to address belief statement issues. The result was the collaborative development of a school mission statement that presents a unified sense of direction for the future.

- b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

Sunset Junior High School's belief statements reflect the intent of the administration and staff to provide every student with a quality educational experience. The need of students to be able to learn and to express what they have learned as individuals is acknowledged. The belief statements identify the importance of the community, administrators, teachers, and parents working together to support student learning.

- c) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

The extent of the alignment among the school's mission statement, belief statements, and DRSLs is somewhat unclear. During the course of the site visit, teachers could explain how they are addressing the school's mission statement, belief statements, and DRSLs within their curriculum and classroom, but the alignment would not be apparent to someone unfamiliar with Sunset Junior High School. The Visiting Team recommends that the DRSLs be revised with the intent to make clear their connection to the belief statements. This work should result in DRSLs that are measurable, with performance indicators for each goal clearly specified. The result will be school goals focused on improving student learning

Curriculum Development:

- a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

Essential knowledge and skills in most content areas are identified and are usually given priority in the development of the curriculum. The teachers are familiar with the Utah Core Curriculum and the Davis Essential Skills and Knowledge (DESK), which are the cornerstones of student learning standards. The school's action plan and the Curriculum Focus Group have identified the need to align the teaching strategies and learning activities with research-based instructional

practices in implementing curriculum. The Visiting Team supports the efforts of the focus group to use research and best practices to meet the learning needs of the students.

- b) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?*

Positive collaborative efforts are in evidence. Teachers have been unified in teaching reading strategies throughout the curriculum. Next year, they plan to include the Six Traits of Writing in their school-wide literacy efforts. Several faculty members have begun developing curricular and instructional plans in anticipation of the professional learning and sharing that will begin in the fall of 2004. The Visiting Team found evidence that the DRSLs are becoming part of discussion and decision-making among teachers. It is clear that the DRSLs will be the focus of professional learning and departmental studies. With the press of accreditation activities this past year, the Curriculum Focus Group has identified the need to provide the faculty with quality research and information on best practices as the next step in their plan to bring congruence to the DRSLs and each teacher's curriculum.

One of the central tenets of effective middle-level education is providing students with a curriculum that is relevant, connected, and engaging. While teachers are exploring ways to incorporate common strategies and methods of literacy education across the curriculum, the Visiting Team recommends that they also explore ways of interconnecting their curricula across grade levels. It is strongly recommended that the teachers revisit the research regarding teaming to enhance student understanding and achievement.

Quality Instructional Design:

- a) *To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

It is evident that most of the professional staff individually, and in some cases collectively within departments, designs and demonstrates a variety of effective instructional strategies that address varying student learning styles and actively engage students. The Visiting Team observed teachers using cooperative learning groups, lecture/question instruction, modeling, visual aids, technology-aided instruction, experiments, use of manipulatives, and hands-on activities. The Visiting Team would recommend that all teachers continue to explore "best practices" and increase collaboration among teachers within departments and across the curriculum.

Effective classroom management and organizational strategies were observed to maximize the students' academically engaged class time. Teachers employed strategies such as Socratic debate to engage higher-order thinking skills that require students to apply their learning in other contexts.

- b) *To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?*

In the most of the classes observed, teachers were using multiple instructional strategies and varying the teaching strategies two or more times within the class time. Some teachers gave the students an opportunity to choose activities from a menu that addressed different learning styles and grading expectations.

Most teachers were conscious of the need to vary instructional strategies to meet the needs of all students. The Sunset Junior High teachers do make accommodations to meet the needs of individual students. Such accommodations are not limited to those students with Individual Education Plans, but are also for students for whom English is a second language. The Visiting Team encourages continued efforts to utilize in-house and district experts who have the specific skills and training needed to work with the diverse needs of the student population.

The administration and staff have indicated the need to increase the availability and usage of the disaggregated student data. The results of the disaggregated data would affect the selection of "best practices" to be used, and assist teachers to modify and adjust instruction according to student needs. The Visiting Team concurs with the administration and staff that disaggregated data should be used to improve instructional strategies for the benefit of all students.

- c) *To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

Sunset Junior High School offers a variety of programs to support student learning. The school offers Reading 180 courses for students reading three or more years below grade level, and Reading SOAR classes for students reading one or two years below grade level, during regular school hours. Computer labs are available for students before and after school, and are used regularly throughout the school day. There is an after-school tutoring program and a math tutoring program to assist students outside of regular class time. A bus is operated after regular school hours to make these services accessible to all students.

The administration and staff also recognize that student learning is affected by specific risk factors. Students learn more effectively when they feel safe both at school and at home. Programs have been established to assist students in dealing with grief, loss, and divorce. A Reconnecting Youth class has been developed to

provide at-risk students with social and academic success skills. The Peer Mediation Team Program has been very successful in helping students deal with social problems, resulting in a reduction of tension and anxiety in the school's atmosphere.

Quality Assessment Systems:

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

Through classroom observations and teacher interviews, the Visiting Team found that teachers have great latitude in selecting types of assessments and determining grades. Teachers use a wide range of assessments. In Sunset Junior High's school profile, there is no data on the types of assessments or grading systems used school-wide other than the state standardized tests. The Assessment Focus Group is aware of the need for a clearer understanding of who is achieving and who is not. Several departments have defined expectations for student achievement and developed performance standards, but the Visiting Team found that this information is not clearly shared with stakeholders. The Visiting Team recommends that the school work to bring the DRSLs, grading, and assessment into closer alignment.

- b) *To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?*

Most of the teachers use the district-driven DESK standards, which include the State Core Curriculum as the basis for curriculum development and assessment. Teachers are familiar with the DRSLs, and many have them available for their use. There is no evidence that the DRSLs have been directly connected to curriculum content and assessment. The Visiting Team hopes that the beginning of collaboration, which has been heard so clearly in conversations with the staff, serves to generate success in the development and implementation of the school-wide writing rubric for 2004-2005 school year.

- c) *To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?*

In most cases, performance standards and criteria for judging student performance are clearly defined and applied on an equitable basis. The faculty is aware of the need to assess different levels of specific performance standards when evaluating student achievement. Some of the issues identified were the quantity and difficulty in grading and SPED/ESL students, clearly assessing progress in reading, and providing motivation for students to do their best work. The Visiting Team is confident that the staff is committed to fair and equitable assessment of student performance, and recommends the continued study, development, and implementation of fair and equitable assessments.

Leadership for School Improvement:

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

The Visiting Team found that the leadership promotes quality instruction by:

- Supporting staff members in their efforts to improve their level of reading and writing instruction by providing professional development.
- Providing the means to take advantage of professional development opportunities, either in-house or through outside opportunities.
- Being quality instructional leaders.
- Modeling professional behavior.
- Fostering a positive learning environment.
- Providing supplies, equipment, books, and needed materials for students in the classrooms.
- Providing programs to support and reward learning, as well as clubs to provide students with a sense of community.
- Providing time for staff members to work together in a collaborative culture for the improvement of instruction.

The leadership of Sunset Junior High School has focused its professional efforts on the improvement of reading and writing in all disciplines. The staff members have been encouraged to attend seminars, conferences, and other professional development opportunities.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?*

The principal and his administrative team regularly use data to inform decisions. Through the accreditation process, teachers and staff members have been encouraged to make assessments based on data. Though it is not reflected in the school's self study, the Visiting Team found that program development and assessment are based on the use of data. Those teachers whose classes take state assessments such as the CRTs clearly use the results to assess curriculum and instruction.

Dr. Schmidt attempts to involve all constituent groups when making decisions. The school has an active School Community Council, Parent/Teacher/Student

Association, and a Joint Staff Study Committee that provides site-based management. Teachers and parents report that Dr. Schmidt has worked hard to create a climate where differing viewpoints are respected and where all are invited to contribute to school improvement efforts.

The principal views the accreditation school improvement process as ongoing, and intends to foster the continuing work of committees composed of administrators, faculty and staff members, parents, and students. Teachers will be encouraged to monitor student achievement and to modify their instruction to meet the needs of their students. The faculty has expressed a sincere desire to collaborate in this effort, using the resources of counselors, social workers, and other staff members.

The Visiting Team recommends that the school staff engage in a study of effective middle-level practice as they work to refine the DRSLs and action plan to provide optimal opportunities for student achievement.

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?*

Although this is not clearly articulated in the school's self-study, the Visiting Team found that the administration and faculty effectively analyze SAT and CRT data to assess student progress. Dr. Schmidt's leadership is data-driven, and he provides the faculty and staff members with data to inform their decision-making. The school is focused on developing plans to improve literacy, and to meet the needs of at-risk students. It should be noted that the Case Management Team, consisting of administrators, counselors, teachers, trackers etc., regularly address individual student needs. It was reported that this team is providing services, in one form or another, to over two hundred students.

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?*

The Visiting Team found that the leadership provides effective organizational and efficient operational management. School-wide policies and procedures are consistent with the school's beliefs and mission statement, and are designed to support student learning. The allocation and use of resources are aligned with school goals.

The school-wide action plans; and the resulting departmental plans, address the need to improve building safety. Most of the concerns identified were problems with the physical plant. The Visiting Team strongly recommends that an assessment of students' safety concerns be conducted. Many students reported that their sense of safety was affected by student behavior that stood uncorrected

by the adults. The Visiting Team suggests that the action plan be amended to include professional learning and the establishment of programs and procedures to better enable adults to effectively create a safe and positive school climate.

- e) *To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the Dress, and school improvement efforts?*

The allocation and use of resources at Sunset Junior High are aligned with the school goals and school action plan. The Visiting Team is confident that, as the school refines the DRSLs and action plan to more clearly define goals and objectives, allocations will be given to support implementation and assessment. The Visiting Team recommends that resources (in terms of time and funding for professional development) be focused on developing staff understanding of issues, as well as consensus and commitment to the effort needed to effectively implement the action plan.

- f) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?*

The administrative team recognizes and empowers staff members, parents, and students to share in the responsibility of leadership. All staff members are encouraged to take an active role in the school community, in terms of participation and/or input regarding school community issues. Students are also encouraged to play an active role in the school community through representation as peer mediators or members of the Student Council, or as student representatives on the Action Committee. The administration is encouraged to continue building the knowledge, skills, and expertise of the staff to employ data-driven and research-based decision making.

Community Building:

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

The Visiting Team recognizes the positive and productive relationships that exist among teachers, support staff members, and administrators. There is evidence that the school is creating and sustaining a learning environment. The staff is to be commended for the many opportunities students are given to become part of the community, such as the Multi-Cultural Club, MESA, NJHS, etc.

The Visiting Team noted that student surveys showed a low score in the “Teachers Care” category. The Community Building Focus Group did not include information regarding positive student relationships. While several

students agreed with the comment, “Teachers care. It just takes time to get past the wall,” a few students mentioned that they feel they are not accepted by teachers or students because they are different. The Visiting Team encourages dialogue and discussion concerning how teachers and students view relationships, cultural diversity, tolerance, and the breaking down of social barriers that come about because of geographic location or socioeconomic status.

The Visiting Team encourages the staff to continue its collaboration across departments, while fostering collegiality and providing cross-curricular connections for students. Given the size and demographics of Sunset Junior High, consideration needs to be given to the creation of smaller learning communities where students feel greater connectedness to adults and to their peers.

- b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

The school engages parents and families as partners in the learning process through a variety of programs, resources, and instructional materials. Parents can access grades, assignments on the school website, and communicate with teachers through the Internet. Parents, teachers, and administrators all have a voice on the School Community Council.

The Visiting Team commends Sunset Junior High for its efforts to build collaborative networks of support with community members, groups, youth-serving agencies, clergy, government leaders, and leaders of business and education. The school routinely provides outreach in the form of such programs as a “Sundevil Day” workshop for parents, as well as prevention information and parenting skill classes.

The Visiting Team also recommends investigating additional ways to increase parental involvement and communication.

Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:

- a) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

Dr. Schmidt believes that professional development is critical to the school improvement process. The faculty affirms that, through his leadership, teachers are encouraged and provided with opportunities for professional learning. The school has an early-out schedule that provides time for learning. The Visiting Team found evidence that teachers incorporate new learning into instructional practice.

For the past two years, much of the professional development time built into the school's schedule has been focused on the accreditation process. As such, some whole staff learning has been curtailed to provide time for the work the faculty has done to develop the profile and action plan. However, along with the accreditation work, the faculty has engaged in training on the Six Traits of Writing and on "bullying prevention."

The Visiting Team commends the staff and faculty for their commitment to professional growth, and suggests that the staff focus resources on training that will further the goals of the school's action plan by providing cohesive learning that can be implemented by all teachers and staff members.

b) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

Sunset Junior High's culture invites stakeholders to become actively involved in the reform process. The administration works closely with faculty and staff members in the setting of the Joint Staff Study Committee (JSSC) that meets monthly. This committee oversees the overall organization of the school. As part of the School Improvement Plan (Action Plan) an action committee, composed of the principal, teachers, a parent, and students, will have the responsibility to monitor the plan's implementation, ensure that adequate and appropriate professional development is in place to sustain the plan, and develop means to assess the plan's effectiveness.

Teachers report that they regularly meet in departments to discuss students' progress and to adjust instruction to meet students' needs. Several teachers have also begun working together to integrate their curricula across subject and grade levels. The Visiting Team commends the degree to which the faculty members are sincerely committed to providing quality educational opportunities for their students.

The combined efforts of the faculty, staff, and administration to engage in the accreditation process has served to break down departmental walls and create opportunities for dialogue. It has also invigorated some who had grown complacent. The Visiting Team encourages the school's JSSC and Action Committee to create a formalized structure to support collaboration.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

This chapter does not apply to Sunset Junior High School. Most of our public junior/middle schools are not accredited through NAAS, but only by the USOE—it is their choice to join NAAS or not.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

- a) *To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?*

Sunset Junior High has developed a six-year plan for student achievement that focuses on literacy, collaboration, and the creation of a safe, appropriate environment for young adolescents. It is apparent that the plan is the result of the faculty and staff's critical look at the student achievement data and sober reflection on what the surveys of staff, parents, and particularly students revealed.

The action plan has identified types of professional development required for implementation. It has been designed to complement changes initiated in the last couple of years. While this is not clearly defined in the school's self-study, the Visiting Team found evidence that all teachers have been learning about literacy and applying their knowledge in the classroom. The school has also worked to increase students' perceptions of safety and well-being.

- b) *To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?*

The Action Plan Committee spent considerable time inviting input for the plan and then providing opportunity for discussion and deliberation on the plan's components. Once consensus had been reached, each department developed its own plan in relation to the school-wide plan.

The Visiting Team found that most staff and faculty members could speak about their role in the process of developing the plan. Teachers provided evidence that they were evaluating their own practice in light of the plan. It is apparent that the school has common goals and objectives. Teachers clearly see the need to become more educated about literacy and to alter instructional practice to affect student achievement.

The Visiting Team found that the second goal of the action plan, that of providing a safe environment, is not clearly perceived as being under the teachers' locus of

control. As the departments developed action plans in relation to the school-wide plan, most were concerned with physical plant safety as opposed to classroom climate and issues that were teacher-controlled. While the staff and faculty have been involved in bullying prevention training, students reported that, in many cases, harassment and put-downs occur in situations in which teachers or staff members could intervene but fail to do so. Physical plant issues such as security cameras and dangerous electrical cords must be given attention, but the Visiting Team recommends that the faculty seek to gain a clearer picture of what the adults need to do, teach, and model to promote students' sense of physical and emotional safety. This effort needs to become part of the written action plan.

- b) *How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school-wide action plan appear to be?*

In an effort to hold school stakeholders accountable to the school-wide action plan, the school plans to continue the work of the Action Committee. This committee, composed of the principal, chairs of the focus groups, parents, and students, will have oversight of the action plan's implementation and evaluation. The action plan has clearly defined means of evaluation. The staff will use data such as school records, tracking information, surveys, and student work. Teachers are already in the process of developing rubrics by which student work can be evaluated consistently, regardless of the subject matter. The Visiting Team recommends that, as the school refines its plan yearly, a precise timeline be developed with expectations for students and staff clearly articulated.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends the work the school has engaged in to enhance students' reading skills; it is impressive and is clearly producing results.
- It is apparent that the school improvement process has been ongoing and has been inculcated into the school culture.
- The Visiting Team commends the positive school climate of Sunset Junior High School. The administration, faculty, and staff clearly respect one another, and there is a strong collegial atmosphere in the school. Parents have great appreciation of the work done on behalf of students. Students feel positive about the school and feel supported in their efforts to be successful.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school profile be revised to become a working document, demonstrating with data the progress toward school goals and providing a clear picture to all stakeholders of programs and student achievement. Attention needs to be given to including data that is disaggregated and supplemented with interpretation that demonstrates an understanding of school strengths and limitations.
- As the school faculty engages in a school-wide effort to implement writing across the curriculum, the Visiting Team recommends that the work be data-driven and based on best practices. Teachers will need in-depth training and opportunities to routinely assess instructional methods using student work as a basis for reflection.
- While previous efforts toward or interest in teaming have been received negatively by some, research strongly supports the need for large schools to create smaller learning communities where students feel a greater connectedness and are able to make connections to what they are learning. The Visiting Team strongly encourages the faculty to engage in the study of essential middle-level best practices and work toward the creation of grade-level teams.
- There is clearly tremendous support of professional learning by the administration, and strong interest on the part of teachers. However, much time and money have been spent on furthering individual interests without linkage to specific school goals. In order for the action plan to be successful, whole-school professional development will be needed to more deeply affect student achievement. The Visiting Team suggests that a subcommittee of the Action Plan Committee be developed to provide a professional learning plan in which faculty members receive thorough training, opportunity for application, and time to reflect on efforts and share results with others. Creating a community of learners of staff and faculty members will be integral to the success of Sunset Junior High's *Plan for School Improvement*.